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ABSTRACT

In this discussion on the feasibility of establishing a "National" curriculum for physical education, it is pointed out that it would first be necessary to reach an agreement on the overall goals or objectives of physical education. Consensus would have to be obtained on the primary focus of such a curriculum and a realistic set of desired outcomes. Significant research findings would be required to document claims that physical education programs can, in fact, produce the stated outcomes agreed upon. It would also be necessary to have the support of an adequate legal, and enforceable time table. A clear distinction would have to be maintained between an academic physical education curriculum and a school athletic program. Finally, philosophical and financial support would be needed for the necessary preservice education and inservice staff development programs to implement a national curriculum for physical education. (JD)

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What Would It Take to Make a "National" Curriculum Acceptable*

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A national physical education curriculum? Vic has proposed the question. (Mancini, 1986) Hal has tried to persuade us that he believes it's a solution. (Lawson, 1986) Linda has pointed out some of the risks. (Bain, 1986) My assignment is to predict what it would take to make a national curriculum acceptable.

The first question is, "What do we mean by a national curriculum?" Hal has described what he means by a national curriculum -- and hedged with several disclaimers. I submit that what any one of us on this panel means by a national curriculum is probably less important than what it means to the wider world. The primary reason that I have generally responded to the concept in the negative is that I think most physical educators envision a national curriculum as a planned structured sequence of sports, dance, exercise, and fundamental movement activities. Given that definition, I couldn't accept any national curriculum for public school physical education in the United States. So let's accept most of the disclaimers and consider what it would take for a proposed national curriculum to gain enough acceptance by the physical education profession to make it a viable concept.

First, I believe we will have to agree to define a national curriculum, not as a set of activities, but as a set of desired outcomes. The important distinction is that we will leave the local curriculum planners free to select curriculum content and instructional strategies appropriate to a given student population in a particular community, although we would expect them to be

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accountable for satisfactory progress toward the achievement of nationally endorsed outcomes. It should be immediately obvious that achieving national consensus on a set of desired outcomes is no small project. -- But this would be a sine qua non if any national physical education curriculum is to be acceptable to our profession, not to mention the various publics to whom we are responsible.

Second, and chronologically this would have to come first, we will need to reach some agreement on the overall goals or objectives of physical education. We certainly can't agree on meaningful, well-defined curricular outcomes if we haven't agreed on what our major goals are for physical education in the schools. For at least a quarter of a century, the professional literature has acknowledged three primary emphases or major goals for physical education, most frequently designated as fitness, sport, and movement. At the 1979 Curriculum Theory Conference, Ulrich described the historical development of the physical education curriculum as "a virtual nightmare of curricular ambiguity." (1979, p. 3)

> Physical education's primary focus has moved from an intense and unifocused emphasis on the product of human activity (fitness) to a spellbound, myopic concentration on the process (play behavior) and finally to a conceptual awareness of a process/product oriented humanistic program (movement).

Bain and Studer were the reactors invited to offer prepared responses to Ulrich's paper. Bain examined fitness, sport, and movement theories in terms of their intrinsic and instrumental values and concluded that the important question is, "How can a curriculum be developed which provides access to different types of values?....The development of such pluralistic curricula seems to be the major task facing curriculum designers." (Bain, 1979:16) Although Studer clarified her own commitment to human movement phenomena as the core of the discipline for physical education, she stated: "Physical

education is synonymous with sport and fitness. To think otherwise is a professional deception. Those of us still committed to evolving theories of movement live a precarious professional existence." (Studer, 1979:19)

Seven years have passed since those words were spoken. Where do we stand today? Most professional physical educators would be willing to acknowledge the values of all three (fitness, play or sport, and movement) for participants in school physical education programs. But, even if we could design a pluralistic curriculum that provides access to the important values of each of the three alternatives of fitness, sport, and movement curricula, there is no possible way to implement such a curriculum, short of a daily twelve-year required program. Personally, I doubt that it is realistic to count on improving our public relations that much very soon. Does that mean we should develop and endorse three national curricula? Would we expect each school district to select the best local alternative or would we be willing to give up that responsibility to the fifty state departments of education?

What other choices do we have in our efforts to achieve agreement on the overall goals or objectives of physical education? Could we agree that the major goal of elementary school physical education is the development of movement competence? Would we be able to achieve consensus on a set of desired outcomes if we stated objectives for the learner to include not only to move skillfully, but also to become aware of the meaning of movement, and to gain and apply the knowledge that governs human movement? (Logsdon, et al., 1984)

Is there any likelihood that we could agree on either fitness or sport as the primary focus of the secondary school curriculum in order to develop a realistic set of desired outcomes? I think we will lose our present place in the secondary school curriculum if we don't demonstrate within the next decade

that learners can make documented gains in the health-related fitness; I believe the American public will demand that. Will the coaches, athletes, and sportsmen and sportswomen among us be able to settle for the achievement of sports skill standards at a level which the average student can achieve, in addition to meeting health-related fitness standards, without increasing present curriculum time allocations and resource support levels to physical education? Or will those whose first priority is higher levels of sports performance be able to win more public support for a total physical education curriculum?

How will we accommodate the concerns of our professional minorities? Will we ignore the potential of physical education for the socialization of participants through the development of play concepts, attitudes and behaviors? Will we minimize the potential for the achievement of personal meaning through fitness, sport and movement experiences by giving up the goal of holistic individual development and personal integration? What about the potential of health-related fitness and play behavior concepts in the elementary school curriculum, and the need for movement education at a more advanced level in the secondary schools? Can you build all of these things into a single set of desired outcomes? Or will there be a majority vote to elect our "big brothers" to take over the important value decisions that determine the nature of the curriculum?

I am convinced that it will be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to resolve all these differences of opinion and professional philosophy. But let us suppose, for purposes of discussion, that we will be able to agree upon major overall goals of physical education and upon a set of desired outcomes for a national physical education curriculum. What else would it take to make a national curriculum acceptable?

The third factor is a significant research program. Why would we expect parents and citizens generally to support a required standardized curriculum before we can produce research findings to demonstrate that physical education programs can, in fact, produce the desired learnings reflected in the minimum specified outcomes? We must give less effort to asking questions about what happens in exercise physiology and biomechanics laboratories and more attention to research on what is happening and can happen in schools. Taylor (1986) tells us that, if physical education is to deal with the challenges of the times, we must be compelled "to do a better job of using knowledge generated from research to improve the teaching and learning of physical education in schools." (1986:72) He states that "by its conspicuous exclusion from NAEP (National Assessment of Educational Progress), national laboratories (Regional Educational Laboratories) and centers (R & D Centers), and the numerous commission reports, physical education is one of the school subjects not considered important in the national educational reform movement." (Taylor, 1986:70-71)

Our research activities must include the development of valid and reliable assessment instruments. Furthermore, our assessment tools must be designed for use by elementary and secondary school physical education teachers with a reasonable amount of assistance from qualified school district central staff members or local college or university consultants. It is critical that assessment instruments be adapted to administration in ongoing school instructional settings.

A fourth requirement for the acceptability of a national physical education curriculum is the support of an adequate minimum time commitment sufficient to permit achievement of the desired outcomes which have been established and accepted. No curriculum in any subject can be an effective vehicle

for learning unless the time allocated is enough for good teachers to get the job done. The physical education requirement must have the force of legislative approval and some public agency must have the responsibility and the resources for enforcement.

Fifth, a national curriculum in physical education can be implemented only in schools in which the role of physical education in the school curriculum is acknowledged as an important educational component assigned to a responsible academic department. This is possible only if physical education is clearly distinguished from interscholastic athletics. The physical education faculty must be fully qualified professionals accountable for their academic assignments to a department head who is a full-time physical educator with no responsibility for athletics. Unless clear-cut lines of responsibility are maintained, the educational priorities of physical education are inevitably sacrificed to the local political, economic and popular pressures of the athletic program.

Sixth, and finally, a national curriculum is a viable concept only if all persons responsible recognize at the outset that implementation will require appropriate pre-service education and substantial staff development programs. Teachers must be prepared to plan local curricula as well as to implement "the" curriculum. Much more attention will be required in undergraduate professional programs to curriculum development skills. Every certified teacher will need to understand the curriculum process, to acquire skills of curriculum decision-making, and to develop positive attitudes toward curriculum innovation and change. Teachers in service cannot be expected to strengthen their curriculum development skills on their own time. They must be given released time or extra compensation to carry out the responsibilities of curriculum planning, program evaluation and needed curriculum change.

Creative, dynamic leadership and positive administrative support are essential.

In summary, my position is that a national curriculum in physical education will be acceptable only if six conditions are met.

1. We would have to reach agreement on the overall goals or objectives of physical education.
2. We would need to achieve national consensus on a set of desired outcomes.
3. We would need to generate significant research findings to document our claims that physical education programs can, in fact, produce these outcomes.
4. We would need the support of an adequate legal, enforceable time requirement.
5. We would need to maintain a clear distinction between an academic physical education curriculum and a school athletic program.
6. We would need philosophical and financial support for the necessary pre-service education and in-service staff development programs.

I like to accentuate the positive, but I can't honestly be very optimistic about the probability of meeting all of these conditions in the near future. Perhaps we should stop using the phrase "national curriculum." We might do more for physical education -- and for our present and future students -- if we concentrated upon determining how much consensus on our goals and objectives is possible, upon developing lists of realistic, specific desired outcomes which could serve as guidelines to local curriculum planners, and upon organizing our research efforts so that we could actually document what can be accomplished through a good physical education program. I vote to begin these efforts today.

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